

The Sun.

BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1919.

WRITING A NOVEL.

IT is settled that you are going to write a novel. You have examined your motive and found it pure and worthy of you. Comes now the great question of how to set about the business.

At this point let no one rise up and "point out" that ARNOLD BENNETT has told how. ARNOLD BENNETT has told how to do everything—how to live on twenty-four hours a day (but not how to enjoy it), how to write books, how to acquire culture, how to be yourself and manage yourself (in the unfortunate event that you cannot be some one else or have no one, like a wife, to manage you), how to do everything, indeed, except rise up and call ARNOLD BENNETT blessed.

The trouble with Mr. BENNETT's directions is—they don't work.

The Generally Fatal Moment.

Mr. BENNETT tells you to write like everything and get as much of your novel done as possible before the Era of Discouragement sets in. Then, no matter how great your Moment of Depression, you will be able to stand beside the table, fondly stroking a pile of pages a foot high, and reassure yourself, saying: "Well, but here, at least, is so much done. No! I cannot take my hand from the plough now! No! I must Go On. I must complete my destiny." (One's novel is always one's Destiny of the moment.)

It sounds well, but the truth is that when you strike the Writer's Doldrums the sight of all that completed manuscript only enrages you to the last degree. You are embittered by the spectacle of so much effort wasted. You feel like tearing it up or flinging it in the wastebasket. If you are a RUDYARD KIPLING or an EDNA FERBER you do that thing. And your wife or your mother carefully retrieves your *Recessional* or your *Dawn O'Hara* and sends it to the publisher, who brings it out, regardless of expense, and sells a large number of copies—to the booksellers, anyway.

The Truth About an Author.

Mr. BENNETT also tells you how to plan the long, slow culminant movement of your novel; how to walk in the park and compose those neat little climaxes which should so desirably terminate each chapter; how to —. But what's the use? Let us illustrate with a fable.

Once an American, meeting Mr. BENNETT in London, saluted him jocularly (he meant it jocularly) with the American Indian word of greeting: "How!"

Mr. BENNETT immediately began to tell him how and the American never got away until GEORGE H. DORAN, the publisher, who was standing near by, exclaimed:

"That's enough, ENOCH, for a dollar volume!"

(Mr. DORAN, knowing BENNETT well, calls him by his first name, a circumstance that should be pointed out to G. K. CHESTERTON, who would evolve a touching paradox about the familiarity of the unfamiliar.)

That will do for ARNOLD. If we mention ARNOLD again it must distinctly be understood that we have reference to some other ARNOLD—BENEDICT ARNOLD or MATTHEW ARNOLD or DOROTHY ARNOLD or ARNOLD DALY.

Never Mind the Theme.

Well, to get back (in order to get forward), you are about beginning your novel (nice locution, "about beginning") and are naturally taking all the advice you can get, if it doesn't cost prohibitively, and this we are about to give doesn't.

The first thing for you to do is not, necessarily, to decide on the subject of your novel.

It is not absolutely indispensable to select the subject of a novel before beginning to write it. Many authors prefer to write a third or a half of the novel before definitely committing themselves to a particular theme. For example, take *The Roll Call*, by ARNOLD—it must have been ARNOLD CONSTABLE, or perhaps it was MATTHEW. *The Roll Call* is a very striking illustration of the point we would make. Somewhere along toward the end of *The Roll Call* the author decided that the subject of the novel should be the war and its effect on the son of HILDA LESSWAYS by her bigamous first husband—er, he wasn't exactly her husband, being a bigamist, but we will let it go at that. Now HILDA LESSWAYS was, or became, the wife of EDWIN CLAYHANGER; and GEORGE CANNON, CLAYHANGER'S—would you say, stepson? HILDA'S son, anyway—GEORGE CANNON, the son of a gun—oh, pardon, the son of Bigamist CANNON—the stepson of, or son of the wife of, EDWIN CLAYHANGER of the Five Towns—GEORGE CANNON . . . Where were we? . . .

HILDA LESSWAYS CLAYHANGER, the—well, wife—of Bigamist CANNON . . .

The relationships in this novel are very confusing, like the novel and the subject of it, but if you can read the book you will see that it illustrates our point perfectly.

The Length of Your Novel.

Well, go ahead and write. Don't worry about the subject. You know how it is, a person often can't see the forest for the trees. When you're writing 70,000 words, or maybe a few more, you can't expect to see your way out of 'em very early. When you are out of the trees you can look back and see the forest. And when you are out of the woods of words you can glance over 'em and find out what they were all about.

However, the 80,000 words have to be written, and it is up to you, somehow or other to set down the 90,000 parts of speech in a row. Now 100,000 words cannot be written without taking thought. Any one who has actually inscribed 120,000 words knows that. Any one who has written the 150,000 words necessary to make a good sized novel (though WILLIAM AYLEN WHITE wouldn't call that good measure) understands the terrible difficulties that confront a mortal when he sits down to enter upon the task of authorship, the task of putting on paper the 200,000 mono- or polysyllables that shall hold the reader breathless to the end, if only from the difficulty of pronouncing some of them.

First Aid in First Words.

Where to start? For those who are not yet equipped with self-starters we here set down a few really first class openings for either the spring or fall novel trade:

"MARINDA was frightened. When she was frightened her eyes changed color. They were dark now, and glittering restlessly like the sea when the wind hauls northwest. JACK HATHAWAY, unfamiliar with weather signs, took no heed of the impending squall. He laughed recklessly, dangerously. . . ."

(Story of youth and struggle.)

"The peasant combed the lice from his beard, spat and said, grumbling: 'Send us ploughs that we may till the soil and save Russia. . . . Send us ploughs.'" (Realistic story of Russia.)

"Darkness, suave, dense, enfolding, lay over the soft loam of the fields. The girl, moving silently across the field, felt the mystery of the dark; the scent of the soil and the caress of the night alike enchanted her. Hidden in the folds of her dress, clutched tightly in her fingers, was the ribbon he had given her. With a quick indrawing of her breath she paused, and, screened by the utter blackness that enveloped her, pressed it to her lips. . . ."

(Story of the countryside. Simple, trusting innocence. Lots of atmosphere. After crossing the field the girl strikes across Haunted Heath, a description of which fills the second chapter.)

All these are pretty safe bets if you're terribly hard up. Think them over. Practise them daily for a few weeks.

"EMINENT VICTORIANS" AGAIN.

A COLLEGE instructor in rhetoric who wishes to teach his students the meaning and effect of satire in its most powerful expression cannot do better than to utilize as a text book of illustration Mr. LYTTON STRACHEY'S *Eminent Victorians* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, \$3.50). Almost every sentence is saturated with vitriol.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE, whom all the world has come to regard as a saint, is portrayed as "simply an empiricist"—and what is more, Mr. LYTTON STRACHEY proves his case. "Years after the discoveries of PASTEUR and LISTER she laughed at what she called the germ fetish"; and so she insisted upon keeping the windows open all the time in the hospitals in British India, with fatal effects due to the admission of the fever bearing mosquitoes. Fortunately, Lord LAWRENCE was Viceroy and refused to comply with her direction.

Although FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE was a secluded invalid during the latter half of her long life of ninety-one years, she worked far harder than most Cabinet Ministers. "Her illness, whatever it may have been, was certainly not inconvenient. Lying on her sofa in the little upper room in South street, she combined the intense vitality of a dominating woman of the world with the mysterious and romantic quality of a myth." The implicit detraction which such a statement conveys will not suffice to destroy the reputation of the noblest of Mr. LYTTON STRACHEY'S Victorians.

With the satire directed toward the British statesmen responsible for the massacre of General GORDON at Khartoum we have more sympathy. STRACHEY'S condemnation of GLADSTONE is perfectly just. After the Battle of Omdurman, he says, every one agreed that GORDON had been avenged at last. "At any rate, it had all ended very happily—in a glorious slaughter of twenty thousand Arabs, a vast addition to the British Empire and a step in the peerage for Sir EVELYN BARING." This sentence aptly illustrates how readily Mr. LYTTON STRACHEY can transform himself from the fairest of historians to the most savage of satirists.

The Librarian's Corner

CONDUCTED BY

FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE.

HOW-TO BOOKS.

ONCE let it be conceded that the community owes to any individual or group of individuals special training or instruction in the art of earning a living, the bars are immediately let down and every individual may claim of society the right to perfect himself at public expense in whatever trade or profession he may fancy. Which sage commentary upon certain current tendencies in human affairs is evoked by a letter that was handed on recently with a request for assistance from the library that had received it.

The Compleat Meat Retailer.

"I would like to know," said the writer, "whether you have a book or books that will give me a better idea of how to manage a retail meat market. I have been in this line of business for a number of years, but I find that I am somewhat behind the times in running this line of business up to date. What I want to get at mostly is how to derive at the costs of the different cuts of meat when buying a whole dressed beef or veal at a certain price, also the average cost of each cut, so I can figure out the weights. I would also like to know the modern methods of retailing meats, and at the average cost that one should sell those meats to make a success in this line of business. I would be greatly pleased if it would be possible to get this information, for it would help me considerable in my line of business, which I have been into for a number of years."

A Disappointment.

It was impossible not to sympathize with the writer's eager thirst for knowledge. It was painful to have to advise him that the book he wanted did not exist, so far as available records showed. It seemed a pity to dismiss his request without at least offering some constructive suggestions. There were volumes aplenty in the library, giving minute and copious instructions to would-be workers in other fields of commerce and industry, such as *How to Write Short Stories*, *Newspaper Editing and Reporting*, *Success With Small Fruits*, and similar vocational treatises. The suggestion that the librarian should advise his correspondent to abandon an Art which had not Literature of its own, and take up Journalism, Market Gardening or some of the other callings that might be acquired from available books, was coldly received.

In the pursuit of the non-existent volume on meat market economies and efficiency there had been discovered a great variety of works designed to instruct the practitioners of many trades, none of which was to be found on the library's shelves. Regretting his inability to turn up the precise book desired, but all aglow with the ardor of a discoverer, the investigator hastened to inform the librarian of the existence of *The Bartender's Guide*, *How to Open a Luncheonette*, *How to Win at Poker Dice*, *One Hundred Recipes for Street Fair Fakirs*, *Where to Buy Phoney Jewelry*, and numerous other intriguing titles that seemed essential if the library were to make its Service to Business Men comprehensive and adequate to meet every possible demand. Again the well meant suggestion was rejected.

Getting It Straight.

"Where," the librarian was asked, "do you draw the line?"

"Well, at books dealing with illegitimate or degrading occupations, for one thing," he replied.

"Then you would bar the *Britannica*, because it gives full instructions, with diagrams, on how to play draw poker and the chances of improving one's hand in the draw? Or the *Saturday Evening Post*, which recently published—in the guise of fiction, to be sure—the rules and technical nomenclature not only of crap shooting, but crap with loaded dice? And what is illegitimate or degrading about operating a lunch counter in connection with a soda fountain? Can you refuse to provide instruction in these subjects and continue to educate short story writers and horticulturists?"

"Did you," asked the librarian, "did you ever know a short story writer who learned his business from books? Or a bee keeper? Or any other sort of a craftsman?"

A light began to dawn. "Then you're not really trying to—to—"

"To teach business men their business," interposed the librarian. "No, the most the library can do is to throw sidelights on life in this as in other activities and leave the rest to the correspondence schools."

"And this young man who runs a meat market?"

"We'll just have to refer him to the Beef Trust."